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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ELECTION #39: CANDIDATES SKETCH PLATFORMS

11. (SBU) This is no. 39 in our series on the Dominican presidential election:

Candidates Sketch Platforms

So far only Leonel Fernandez's PLD has published a platform for the May 16 presidential elections. Newspapers of April 26 indicate that Mejia's PRD will release a document in the next few days; Mejia promises that it will be readable, "not some 1500 page document" (the PLD platform consists, in fact, of 150 pages). The closest thing to a general declaration made by the PRSC's Eduardo Estrella is the speech he delivered on April 14 to the American Chamber of Commerce in Santo Domingo.

That day presidential candidates Mejia and Estrella both addressed anti-corruption themes.

Mejia at FINJUS

At the last of 3 events sponsored by U.S.-supported NGO Foundation for Institution-Building and Justice (FINJUS) USAID director Elena Brinema introduced Mejia and acknowledged government advances over the past two years in implementing a transparent, results-oriented budget with an integrated administrative and financial system and reducing presidential discretion in spending.

Mejia acknowledged the difficulty of combating "traditional" corruption in the Dominican Republic, owing to ineffective laws and judicial laxness. He used the occasion to slam rival Fernandez as "tax evader" unable to explain the origins of his own fortune. Unlike the Fernandez government, Mejia said, his administration confronted these problems head on, by passing various laws and establishing decrees and administrative standards to battle the problem. He had created an advisory commission to fight corruption and an ethics code for public service. Mejia reaffirmed his respect for the separation of powers and the requirement not to influence or criticize judicial decisions. He declared himself scandalized at Fernandez's "nerve" in coming to address FINJUS on the topic of corruption and asserted that Fernandez had repeatedly fired officials who wanted to attack corruption. Mejia cited Administrative Subsecretary Miguel Solano and prosecutor Guillermo Moreno.

Estrella Sketches a Platform at the AmCham

Before an American Chamber of Commerce audience the PRSC's Eduardo Estrella advocated changing economic and other policies of the two previous administrations. "Dominicans should be able to trust their government and aspire to success, not languish in desperation."

Estrella said that if elected he would deal with corruption and bank fraud by reversing what he characterized as a lack of transparency and honesty by authorities over the past eight years. He would do so by:

---Not interfering in the prosecution or investigation of any allegations of fraud;

---Involving all citizens in the fight against corruption;

---Designing and launching a "Probity Commission" of civil society and professional groups to monitor the performance of government agencies;

---Establishing a "real" Comptroller General to audit the private assets of government officials and compare these with the officials' required annual declarations of assets; and

---Legislating a presumption of guilt of wrongdoing by officials who manage public accounts, who would be obliged to prove their innocence.

On economic problems, Estrella saw a need to deter peso devaluation and to place ceilings on internal and external debt. He favored speeding up signing and implementation of

the U.S.-Dominican free trade agreement during the post-election transition (before Aug. 16) and urged negotiation of a similar trade agreement with the European Union.

Among other measures, Estrella advocated:

---Fiscal Reform. He slammed the current policy of increasing taxes. He called for a fiscal responsibility law similar to those in Brazil and Peru, reducing executive discretion in spending and prescribing criminal penalties for violators.

---Austerity. Estrella promised to reduce waste by restricting official travel abroad, use of cellular phones, purchase of SUVs and luxury vehicles, and electricity consumption.

---Foreign Investment: He proposed offering tax incentives to Dominicans living overseas to return to the country and establish businesses.

---Energy. On the premise that energy sector privatization had been poorly executed, Estrella proposed that generation companies also take over distribution and billing.

---External Debt: He proposed renegotiating to obtain terms similar to those of the early 1990s, which allowed a reduction in principal payments and interest with grace periods lasting for almost 10 years.

Estrella's full presentation is available on the Santo Domingo SIPRNET site.

12. (U) Drafted by Leticia Cantu.

13. (U) This report and others in this series can be read on the SIPRNET at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/> index.cfm along with extensive current material.
HERTELL